

September 2009

To: High Achieving Seventh/Eighth Grade Students and Parents

I am pleased to be able to send you some information about a program from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY). This program is designed to identify, recognize and challenge young people who are academically talented and highly motivated. Some of you may have participated in this program when you were in fifth or sixth grades.

Eligibility Criteria:

- Achievement at the “Advanced” proficiency level in English/Language Arts and/or math (as in our STAR testing program).
- Achievement at the 95th percentile or higher in the reasoning portions of a nationally normed test (e.g. Iowa Test of Basic Skills, ERB – National Norms, etc.)

Because you achieved at a high enough level to meet one or both of these criteria, you are eligible to participate in this Talent Search. Congratulations!

As you will read in the brochure, the Talent Search procedure involves taking either the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the ACT, the same college entrance examinations that high school juniors and seniors take. The SAT includes critical reading, math, and writing. The total testing time is 3 hours and 45 minutes, including a 25 minute essay. The ACT includes four multiple-choice tests in English, math, reading, and science. The total testing time is about 3 hours. Both tests are set at similar levels, so neither test provides an advantage over the other.

Because these tests are designed for students four to five years older, you are not expected to know all of the information that older students have been taught. However, because your reasoning skills are excellent, you will be able to answer many of the questions. In the past twenty-five years students from Del Mar have taken the SAT, and we always have several students who score as well as the average high school senior or better. Parents and students often have questions about this program. I will try to answer many of them here.

What are the advantages of participating in this contest?

Some advantages are:

- Practice in taking the kinds of tests that you will have to take to get into college, including building confidence and feeling less scared of them (“oh, I did that when I was 12 or 13”)
- Information about your intellectual strengths and what you really can show on tests that are above your grade level
- Local, state, or even national recognition if you score well enough
- Opportunity to enroll in accelerated and enriching summer programs at universities (e.g. Stanford) with other high achieving students, again, if you score high enough. These programs are entirely optional.
- Access to educational information and opportunities through the CTY program

How can I decide whether to take one of the tests (VERY IMPORTANT)?

Look over your STAR test results carefully. Check to see if your proficiency scores were in the mid 400’s or higher on both the English/Language Arts and Math parts of the STAR test. If you took another state proficiency test, make sure that you are in the high “commendable” or “advanced” level on that test. I would suggest that unless your scores are in the middle to high “Advanced” levels on both parts, the SAT/ACT may be too difficult. If you took a nationally normed test, your scores should be at least at the 97th percentile in verbal reasoning, reading comprehension, math reasoning, or total math to have a good chance at doing well on the SAT/ACT.

If your scores are at these levels, then you have a good chance of being able to answer some of the questions on both parts. If you were very strong in one area, but not the other, you will still have to take the entire test, but you will probably do better in your stronger area. If you scored very high (near the top of the range) on one section, then it may be worth it to try the SAT/ACT.

I do not recommend that you “study” for this test. Nor do I recommend that you take it if you are not really interested, if you don’t like academic challenges, or if you would feel defeated if you don’t do as well as you usually do on tests (you probably won’t get all of the answers correct). On the other hand, if you can look on this as a “fun” challenge, enjoy intellectual activities, wouldn’t mind giving up three hours on a Saturday morning and want some practice on a similar test to one you will be taking to get into college, then, by all means, try.

You might ask why, with all of these cautions, I’m sending this information to you. I do like to make opportunities available to all eligible students, and give you the choice whether or not to participate. Talk this over with your parents, but it is completely your voluntary decision whether to participate or not.

Can I do anything to prepare, so I’ll know what the test is like?

Because these are such challenging tests, I will be conducting lunchtime practice sessions once every week or two to give students an opportunity at school to become familiar with the format of the test and to learn some strategies and skills that will help them. If you’re not sure if you want to take the test, come to a few practice sessions to help you make up your mind. Even if only a few students are interested in the sessions, I will be happy to meet with them. Listen for an announcement in the morning bulletin. It will say “SAT practice session with Dr. Gold in Room 6 at the second lunch bell.” Practice sessions will start in October. If you do decide to take the test, but don’t want to come to the practice sessions, I would advise that you go over the practice booklet that you receive when you register for the test.

Which test should I take, the SAT or the ACT?

I’m personally much more familiar with the SAT, since most of our students take that one. I would say that our students often have more difficulty with Verbal part of the SAT, which now includes writing an essay. If you are an avid reader and a good writer, then you might choose the SAT. If you are knowledgeable in science and math, then the ACT might be a good choice (it’s also a little shorter), although I imagine the math in both tests is comparable. I will go over both tests in the practice sessions. Most of our students recently have taken the SAT 1, but a few have taken the ACT.

Can I take the test later in the year, when I know more math?

Students may take these tests whenever they are offered, but **you must take the December or January test to participate in the contest.** It doesn’t make much sense to take the tests at another time while you are in seventh or eighth grade.

When Should I Take the Test?

If you really might take one of the summer courses, if you qualify, then CTY suggests that you take the December or February test to apply by February for the courses. Registration for summer courses begins in January, 2010. You may test anytime through June 12 (SAT), or June 5 (ACT) to qualify for state recognition or to qualify for online courses.

Where can I find out what summer courses are offered?

You can go on the CTY website: www.cty.jhu.edu for detailed information about application procedures, eligibility criteria for the summer courses, and course offerings for 2009 (the 2010 course listing is not available yet). The website will also address many of your questions.

If I don't do that well, will the scores go on my record and will they hurt my chances of getting into college?

Only your parents and I will see the scores. When you apply to college in four or five years, your scores on the SAT or ACT will be better. Colleges recognize that your most recent scores are what count, not the scores you received in seventh or eighth grade, so don't worry about that.

Is this just a gimmick for Johns Hopkins and the College Board to get money out of us?

I like to think not. This program has been going on for thirty five years and students seem to benefit from the experience. I've known numbers of students who have taken courses during the summer and have been pretty uniformly pleased.

The two steps in the application process (to CTY and then to apply for the test itself) cost a lot of money (\$37 + either \$45 or \$32). Is there any financial aid, if I can't quite afford this but my child and I would still like to participate?

Yes, use the paper application form indicating your income and CTY will contact you with scholarship opportunities.

I know there is the SSAT (Secondary School Admission Test), also. Which one should I take, the SSAT or the SAT/ACT?

If you are going to apply for private high school(s), then you will need to take the SSAT. If you're in the 8th grade, you will need to take the SSAT in December or January, so consider whether you want to do two tests. The SSAT is easier, but similar in format and length. If you're in 7th grade, and considering private high schools, you could take the SAT or ACT this year, and that will serve as practice for the SSAT in 8th grade. If you're not considering private high school at all, but would like practice on these kinds of tests and you think the SAT/ACT would be a bit too difficult, then take the SSAT sometime this year or next for practice. If you want a chance at the local or state recognition or one of the summer courses, then take the SAT/ACT. The SSAT is not part of a contest.

I hope this answers most of your questions. The application is included in the brochure, which you can pick up at school.

On the application the School Code is: 9492066. For "Qualifying Test" use "State Test" or the specific test if using another test. Leave "Percentile Rank" blank if using the STAR test or provide percentiles, if available, from another test.

I would hope that this answers all of your questions. Since my time is limited this year, please contact me by email (agold@reedschool.org) only if you have a question I haven't addressed. I'm sorry that I can't have a lengthy discussion with every parent to decide if taking the test would be a good idea or not. I would appreciate your informing me if you are planning to take the test. I look forward to working with you if you take on this exciting challenge.

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District Psychologist